



WEEKLY REPORT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 7, 2004

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EDUCATION BILL BECOMES MAGNET FOR AMENDMENTS

There is a quote that is attributed to the German statesman Otto Von Bismarck that goes something like this: "If you like laws and sausages, you should never watch either one being made." After spending nearly 30 years witnessing the lawmaking process at both the federal and state level, I realize just how true that sentiment is.

Passing a new law is never easy, and when you arrive at the final weeks of a legislative session it's especially tough to get a clean bill through.

Each year there are a couple of bills that become magnets for amendments, that's just the way that the legislative process works. This session I have the dubious honor of handling one of those bills.

I am serving as Senate sponsor for House Bill 1040 and 1041, the original intent of which was to make changes to Missouri's education policies.

Senate leadership allots only a certain amount of floor time for debate on each bill. The addition of numerous amendments can lead to a good bill dying on the calendar.

During a three-hour debate in the Senate on Wednesday, a total of 16 amendments were added to HB 1040-1041, while a number of others were either withdrawn by the sponsor or rejected by the Senate.

The only way to achieve legislative success at times like this is by having a good working relationship with your colleagues.

As time drew near to close debate, I met with five senators who had prepared eight different amendments to add to this bill. I met with each one, explained the importance of passing this bill in the time allowed, and each senator agreed to drop his or her amendment. I

appreciate their cooperation and had they not worked with me, this important bill could have been tabled and might never have been brought up again this session.

HB 1040 and 1041 began as clear-cut legislation that made some important changes in education accountability.

It also allowed the General Assembly to appropriate additional funds for the teacher's Career Ladder program. Most of the school districts in Southwest Missouri utilize the Career Ladder as an incentive to encourage exceptional teachers.

With the Senate amendments it became a much more expanded education bill.

Among the amendments is one which would recalculate the way summer school attendance affects a public school district's state aid.

Other amendments:

- Would prohibit school officials from strip-searching students suspected of concealing drugs or weapons, instead requiring law enforcement officers to be called in and parents to be notified.
- Students who are expelled from schools for having a weapon wouldn't be counted against a district's persistence to graduation ratio.

After all of the amendments, it is easy to forget that underneath there is a good bill.

A conference committee – made up of members appointed by House and Senate leadership – will be set up for this bill, and during the coming week we will meet and attempt to develop legislation that both sides of the legislature can agree on.

This will be a complex issue for the conference committee, but it is an important one because the provisions within this bill will impact education in Missouri for years to come.

The 2004 Legislative Session will adjourn at 6 p.m. on May 14. I will continue to keep you updated on this and other legislation.

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